transfer of funds through partner banks of UTI Bank, overseas, to beneficiary accounts in India. The portal would also provide information on investment opportunities available to retail investors. The facility is scheduled to go live within six months from the date of launch of the pilot.

Opening of branches by foreign banks

236. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that his Ministry and the Reserve Bank of India have agreed to allow foreign banks to open 20 branches a year in the country as against 12 now;

(b) if so, the reasons for not allowing strong co-operative banks to open a single branch each; and

(c) the constitutional basis for such a discrimination?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) In the "Road Map for presence of the foreign banks in India" issued by the Reserve bank of India (RBI) on 28.02.2005, it is proposed to go beyond the existing World Trade Organisation (WTO) commitment of 12 branches in a year for new and existing foreign banks and to follow a more liberal policy for under-banked areas. However, the applications of the foreign banks are examined on merit before granting permission for opening a new branch.

(b) Applications of the State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) for opening of branches in terms of provisions of Section 23 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 are examined by the RBI depending upon the merits of the case. As regards District Central Co-operative banks, the powers to allow opening of branches rests with the Registrar of Co-operative Societies of the respective States.

(c) No instance of discrimination has been brought to the notice of the Government.

Commercial banking network in rural areas

237. SHRI N.R. GOVINDARAJAR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Commercial Banking Network in rural areas is handicapped as most of the bank branches are one man branch or lack